Koocanusa Reservoir Transboundary Monitoring Task Group

Status Summary – Spring 2019

In the summer of 2018 the Koocanusa Reservoir Transboundary Monitoring Task Group was formed to collaborate on 2019-2020 transboundary monitoring plans and activities for the Koocanusa Reservoir, with an emphasis on selenium.

This work was initiated in the spring of 2018 when the BC Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy asked for comments on a draft monitoring program for the Koocanusa Reservoir. Montana and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) submitted feedback which recommended additional monitoring be carried out for the entirety of the Reservoir, including both BC and Montana.

The Task Group includes representatives from the BC Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), the United States Army Corps of Engineers (US ACE) and Teck Coal Ltd., with representatives from the USEPA participating as observers. The monitoring proposed is informed and based upon scientific input from the Lake Koocanusa Selenium Technical Subcommittee and Monitoring and Research Committee over the past several years.

Koocanusa Reservoir is a transboundary waterbody crossing the BC-Montana border. Teck Coal Ltd. operates five coal mines in the Elk Valley in BC which discharge effluent, resulting in increased levels of selenium in the Reservoir.

The Reservoir, as a lentic environment, is a sensitive location in the watershed for the accumulation of selenium in aquatic life due to the operation of the Libby Dam and being downstream from existing mining activities.

Key Deliverables:

In the fall of 2018 the Task Group members jointly developed and approved a project charter identifying roles, responsibilities, deliverables and timelines for the project. The project's key deliverables include:

- Development of a sampling design for 2019-2020 monitoring in the US portion of the Reservoir;
- Draft recommendations for:
    - Roles, responsibilities and sources of funding for implementation of the sampling design and making the collected data available to project participants with consideration for public roll-out; and
    - a process for follow-up discussions to address post-2020 considerations.

Current Status:

A draft sampling design for 2019-2020 monitoring in the US portion of the Reservoir was agreed to in December 2018. In early 2019 the Task Group held technical meetings with a subset of participants to address logistics, sources of funding and contracting in order to implement the sampling design.

On May 3, 2019 the Task Group met to confirm its members are ready, willing and able to proceed with monitoring activities in the field for the 2019 season. The relevant parties have made bilateral arrangements for funding, contracting and logistics in order to implement the sampling design.

US ACE and Teck have updated and shared their final 2019 sampling procedures/plans.

The Task Group also identified a number of long-term issues to be addressed, including:

- Data entry
- Data management activities
- Communication strategy / data availability
- Plans for beyond 2020

Field work for 2019 began mid-May. US ACE and Teck will monitor preliminary data from the 2019 field work and notify the Task Group participants of any significant or alarming results/trends.

The Task Group will meet again in September 2019 (timing TBD) to discuss the summer's monitoring activities, any preliminary results of interest, and to begin addressing long-term issues.

Involvement of Indigenous Governments:

Indigenous groups and stakeholders were informed about the project at the October Monitoring and Research Committee meeting in Cranbrook and provided an opportunity to raise comments at that time.

The work is largely undertaken by US ACE who may be unable to accommodate others in the field work given the logistical and safety/capacity issues with the sampling on the reservoir.

Attachments:

- The sampling design (also called sampling matrix) document agreed to in 2018
- US ACE's final sampling procedures
- Teck's final sample plan